

**An Assessment of African Christian Beliefs in
Ancestors in view of a Responsible Interpretation
of 1 Corinthians 8: 4-6 within the South African
Context.**

by

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Declaration

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the work contained in this thesis is my own original work, except where reference is made to authors, and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it at any university for a degree.

Signature.

Date.

Abstract

The object of this study is to assess African Christian beliefs in ancestors in lieu of a responsible interpretation of 1 Corinthians 8 :4 – 6. Warranting this assessment is the confusion that arises from the perception that African beliefs in ancestors and the tenets of Christian faith are compatible. Scriptural teaching seems to address the question of “ancestral worship” and does seem to portray it as something *mutually exclusive* to the tenets of Christian faith. Some of the authors cited in the thesis attest to this, and others seem to be rising in defence of “ancestor worship” by accommodating it without any problem on the same level as Christianity. Syncretism arises in the desire to strike a compromise between the two religions and allow African Christians to practise “ancestor worship” whilst confessing to be Christians at the same time.

The selected text, 1 Corinthians 8: 4-6, will be the centre of the assessment into the practice of “ancestor worship” by African Christians. This is because it contains a passage where Paul addresses the issue of food dedicated to idols. Paul’s resolution of the issue - with his intention of maintaining harmony in the church and in the spirit of love - seems to accommodate the eating of meats offered to idols, but encourages abstinence in consideration of the weak. This principle of love may seem to bring accommodation, yet after a rigorous discussion the thesis concludes that the text still excludes the worship of idols. “Ancestor worship” is in this thesis seen to be within the given definitions of idolatry as it involves the sacrificing of meats and foods to ancestors and the deceased.

In the final analysis the quest for a solution to ancestor beliefs and practices by African Christians challenges the Church to focus on a responsible interpretation of Biblical texts, and in such a way that it would bring light as to whether ancestor beliefs and practices are in continuation with Biblical perspectives or not.

Opsomming

Die doel van hierdie studie is om Afrika-Christene se opvattinge met betrekking tot hul voorouers aan die hand van 'n verantwoorde verstaan van 1 Korintiërs 8:4-6 te evalueer. Die studie is genoodsaak deur verwarring oor die vraag of die beginsels en praktyke van “vooroueraanbidding” met die Christelike geloof versoen kan word. Volgens die studie blyk dit dat die gekose teks die vraag van “vooroueraanbidding” aanspreek, en wel as *onversoenbaar* met die wesenswaardigheid van die Christelike geloof. Sommige van die bronne waarna die tesis verwys, onderskryf hierdie standpunt, terwyl ander “vooroueraanbidding” verdedig en probleemloos op dieselfde vlak as die Christelike geloof akkommodeer. Die gevolg is dat sinkretisme ontstaan as 'n kompromis tussen dié twee perspektiewe, wat dit vir belydende Afrika-Christene moontlik maak om “vooroueraanbidding” te bedryf.

1 Korintiërs 8:4-6 vorm die kerngesigspunt vanwaar die praktyk van “vooroueraanbidding” deur Afrika-Christene geëvalueer word. In dié gedeelte bespreek Paulus die vraag of Christene voedsel mag eet wat aan afgode gewy is. In die lig van sy bedoeling om 'n gees van liefde en eenheid in die gemeente aan te moedig, laat hy ruimte vir Christene se vryheid om afgodsvleis te eet, maar beveel aan dat dit ter wille van swakkeres in die geloof liefsvleis gelaat moet word. Hoewel die liefdesbeginsel ruimte mag laat vir die akkommodering van “vooroueraanbidding”, kom die tesis ná indringende bespreking tot die slotsom dat 1 Korintiërs 8:4-6 dit as 'n opsie vir Christene uitsluit. “Vooroueraanbidding” word hier gedefinieer as afgodery, aangesien dit die offerande van vleis en ander kos aan voorouers en afgestorwenes insluit.

Om enigszins 'n oplossing vir die probleem van “vooroueraanbidding” deur Afrika-Christene te vind, vra in die finale instansie dat kerke sal fokus op 'n verantwoorde interpretasie van die Bybel, wat sal kan aandui of sodanige geloofspraktyke 'n voortsetting van Bybelse perspektiewe is al dan nie.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

The controversy surrounding ancestor beliefs and practices among African Christians must not be underestimated. This issue has led to hot debates among Christians and non-Christians alike, in the metropolitan area of East London. In this area the African belief in life after death is evidenced by numerous practises that are done on behalf of the dead.

According to Mbiti (1969:162) as soon as a person dies, he/she becomes a living dead. He/she is a spirit in the sense that he/she is no longer in the body and yet he/she retains features that describe him/her in physical forms. African Christians and non-Christians in the E.L metropolitan area may be having their differences with regard to the Christian faith and African Tradition belief, but when it comes to rituals performed on behalf of the ancestors, they both converge in agreement.

The Church on the other hand in this geographic area seems for one reason or another to have overlooked the phenomenon of ancestor beliefs and practises among its membership. Membership in the Church seems to focus more on the memorisation of the tenets of faith and dogmas of a particular denomination than on socio-cultural and religious values of the converts.

Some people in and around East London regard the Church as just another business enterprise, where a lot of money is accumulated for the running of the Church and payment of the clergy salaries. This growing concern among African Christians regarding this issue is that, the calling and training of clergy is no longer a sacred affair as it used to be, but seems to be only a profession that anyone can acquire by attending a theological seminary in order to earn a living.

These controversial issues regarding the African Christian beliefs and practices in and around East London which are a cause for concern, have also been a driving force behind the decision to undertake this research project.

The thesis will kick-off by narrating the autobiographical position of the author. This will be an eye-opener to the reader, so as to acquaint him or herself about the background and environmental circumstances of the author that may have sparked the

burning wish for conducting research on the subject of ancestor beliefs and practices by African Christians, in his place of birth. In the autobiography, mention is made of a personal encounter of the author with circumstances of such nature as the one to be discussed hereunder viz. ancestor practices.

As will be revealed in different case studies in this thesis, the Xhosa version of the word “family” is “father’s house” (indlu ka Bawo). According to van der Toorn; (1996: 194) the term “family” could mean a nuclear family, an extended family or lineage in the Ancient Israelite family. The reason why this is mentioned here is because the case studies will show that when a person is born within a Xhosa family, that person does not live all by her/himself, excluded from the rest of other family members. The family rules, customs and religion bind a family member within the Xhosa culture.

This is an entanglement that has been a burden upon many African Christians who, after conversion into Christianity, have found themselves victims of belonging to their respective families. This is even worse when one is a first-born male child of the housefather, where it is expected of him to carry out all the necessary ancestral rituals (belief practices of the family on behalf of the entire family).

The notion is that first-born male children in the Xhosa tradition are heirs of the family asserts and thus take all the responsibility of carrying out the necessary traditional rites.

However, the emphasis of this thesis will be on ancestral beliefs and practices of contemporary Xhosa-speaking Christian groups in and around East London.

1.1 Autobiographical position

Kwelera is a small rural village about 25km from East London and is the birthplace and home of the writer of the thesis. It is where some of these African socio-cultural and religious activities take place among African Christian believers, such as the following case study.

After my father’s death in 1979, a group of seven (7) family members visited me while I was staying in Mdantsane. They had come to remind me about the “bringing

back” (ukubuyisa) ritual on behalf of my late father, which according to them was already overdue.

The family members who approached me on this issue were all male heads of different houses of the family clan of Amaqoma (my clan name). They were also elders and preachers of denominations, like United Congregational Church, Methodist Church and Zionist Church respectively.

According to Van der Toorn (1996:208) also among the Israelites, the name of the deceased heir was to be kept alive from generation to generation. The concern for the survival of the name of the dead was deeply rooted in the minds of the early Israelites. To die without leaving a son was feared as a major misfortune. If there was no male offspring a man had to take proper measures to ensure that the regular rites of commemoration would nevertheless be performed after his death.

By forsaking the cult of the ancestors (i.e. by not offering the libations due to the dead and by failing to invoke their names), the living would lose the moral right to their land.

Family estate, ancestral graves and ancestor cult were closely intertwined realities they could not be very well disentangled Van der Toorn (1996; 210). This was the type of situation that was facing me, as there are similarities between the early Israelite Judaeo society and the Xhosa ways of life.

As an heir to my late father’s estates, the whole family was looking to me to fulfil their required expectations. I explained to them that it would be difficult for me to carry out the ritual as it was against my Christian faith. They left the house very disappointed and sorrowful not only for their part but also for me, fearing what could befall me after I have rejected to perform such an important task that would bring health and prosperity to the entire family.

After I had refused with the kraal (ixhanti) for them to perform the ritual, they were determined to find an alternative site from one of the kraal-heads where the ritual took place. However, news came to me that the beast didn’t bellow, a sign signifying that the ritual was not acceptable to the ancestors. The beast was not slaughtered, and some selected family members left the scene to consult a witch doctor (Sangoma or

igqira) as to why the beast did not bellow. The Sangoma instructed them to go back to the kraal gate (emaxhantini) and address the ancestors (izinyanya) and apologise for having to perform a ritual, leaving behind the ones that precede it.

After this was done, the cattle were driven into the kraal but the one that was to be sacrificed had vanished and got lost, nowhere to be found, up to the time of writing this thesis. I would not like to jump into conclusions regarding the whole failure of the above occasion but the truth is that the ritual of offering a sacrifice for the “bringing home” (ukubuyisa) my late father did not take place.

The above experience has left much confusion to the family and the community at large as to which traditions, cultures and even socio-political activities, a Christian must indulge in, so as not to contradict the Christian Faith. The intention of this biographical note is to portray the confusion that besets a Christian who understands the two religions to be mutually exclusive in an African context. This problem calls for the Church to have a thorough and explicit teaching of the Biblical faith to the recipients of the Gospel of Christ, so as to free them from the guilt, ignorance and confusion concerning ancestral beliefs and practices.

1.2 The Problem Statement

This thesis seeks to make a critical evaluation of ancestor beliefs and practices among African Christians. The problem is that some of the African Christians and authors confess the Christian tenets of faith while on the other hand adhere to traditional belief such as practising of ancestor cults. This is particularly among Xhosa speaking people in the East London metropolitan area.

The simultaneous confession of both tenets of the Christian faith and traditional beliefs in ancestors raises a problem that the writer of the thesis seeks to address. The question is whether the practices of ancestor worship are compatible with the Christian faith in terms of Scripture or whether the two are mutually exclusive.

This warrants the critical evaluation which will be done in the light of the Scripture text 1 Corinthians 8: 4 – 6, “With reference to the eating of meat offered to idols, we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is no God but one. For even if

there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth-as indeed there are many gods and many lords yet to us there is one God the Father, from whom all things exist and we are for him; and there is one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom all things exist, and we exist through him". Although the text of 1 Corinthians 8 as a whole is concerned with meat offered to idols, my emphasis will be on verses 4-6.

The question that may be asked is whether the eating of meat offered to idols can be equated to the veneration of ancestors in the area under study and whether the selected text, 1 Corinthians 8 addresses the main issues. The definition and meaning of the word "idol" will be expressed under "Key or important words" in the thesis (Chapter 1).

1.3 Hypothesis

Scriptural teaching seems to address the question of ancestral worship and does seem to portray it as something mutually exclusive to the tenets of Christian faith. The authors cited in the rest of the thesis attest to this. If ancestor worship is taken to be something that falls neatly within the definition of idolatry, Paul's address will then be a relevant text for dealing with the problem stated in context. If it is also proven that Scripture deals with ancestor worship adequately, it is an accurate interpretation that can answer the questions raised in the first paragraph of section 1.2. Therefore, the quest for a solution to ancestor beliefs and practices by African Christians requires that the Church focuses on a responsible interpretation of Biblical texts that would bring light as to whether such beliefs and practices are not contradictory to Biblical perspectives and ethos.

1.4 Methodology

The methodology of this research project will take the form of multi-dimensional approach, which will focus at different dimensions, viz. Anthropological, Sociological and Religious and Theological dimensions and case study research method to draw certain trends and conclusions. Some literature material dealing with ancestral beliefs and practices from different aspects of life will be employed (Chapter 2).

These will include the worldview of the concept of life after death, the African and Christian point of view in relation to life after death and ancestral beliefs and practices. Further, the anthropological and religious aspects regarding ancestor beliefs within African communities will be described, emphasising (i) sacrificial rites (ii) funeral rites and (iii) societal rites. Each chapter will be concluded by a preliminary conclusion. Chapter 3 will concentrate on an exegesis of the selected text viz. I Corinthians 8:4-6. The historical, textual and theological concepts of the text will be highlighted as an exposition of a responsible interpretation with regard to the research theme. Key or important words that would be used in this part of the thesis will be explained in Chapter 1. Some commentaries will form the bulk of the discussion, followed by a preliminary conclusion.

Chapter 4 will be a critical evaluation of the whole thesis and will be followed by a bibliography.

1.5 Important concepts

1.5.1 Ancestors

According to (Mbiti 1969:83,162) ancestors are the spirits of the dead members of the lineage or clan (the living dead). They ask for meat in dreams and take close interest in the affairs of their descendants. The fact of the matter is that ancestors are capricious, jealous and easily offended and their wrath is an explanation for misfortune (Ibid. 331) they also complain of being hungry and desire to be remembered. Ancestors make their wishes known in two main ways, either through dreams or by illness that is subsequently devised as being sent by them.

1.5.2 Ancestor Worship

The use of the phrase ancestor worship comes from an era when Europeans ruled over foreign cultures and religions (Gresham, 1951: 55). Within the South African context the Xhosa speaking peoples, the concept has been understood to centres around beliefs and practices. Missionaries understood it as a contravention of the first commandment in the text, Exodus 20:3 (Gresham 1951: 55).

1.5.3 Black Theology

This was a twentieth Century North American theological movement. It interprets scripture and Christian Gospel from the context of the oppression of Black people engaged in the struggle for spiritual, social, economic and political liberation. (McKim 1996:31). In later years this movement had an influence on the South African black theologians in the context of their liberation struggle against apartheid.

1.5.4 Christianity

According to Gresham (1951:18-23) Christianity is a life and not a doctrine. It is experience that has doctrine merely as its symbolic intellectual expression, so that while the life abides, the doctrine must necessarily change from age to age. Here we think of change in character of individuals, especially those who have accepted Christ, as an expression of the effectiveness of Christianity, hence “if one is in Christ, one is a new creature” (2 Corinthians 5:17)

1.5.5 Idol

Collins Paperback English Dictionary (2nd edition) defines an idol as an image of a god used as an object of worship and that it is an object of excessive devotion or admiration.

The New Testament writers understood “idols” as anything that places itself between above God and between God and men (Eph. 5:5, Phil. 3:19, 1 John 5:20). Mc Kim (1996: 137) refers to it as a false god or representation of such a one that may be worshipped (Ex. 20:4).

1.5.6 Idolatry

Idolatry on the other hand is the worship of idols. It is an excessive devotion or reverence (Collins Paperback English Dictionary: *ibid.*). The Bible forbids the sacrifice of food to idols (1 Corinthians 8:4-6). In the first commandment (Exodus

20:3) God forbids Israel from having ‘other gods’ before Him. Having ‘other gods’ would amount to idolatry in the sense of this Scripture.

1.5.7 Exegetical Methods

The process used to interpret and explain the meanings of scripture passages. Many different exegetical methods have been used through the history of the Church and some are to be found among contemporary biblical scholars. (McKim 1996).

1.5.8 Historical Criticism

A means of biblical criticism that studies texts according to their historical settings. This includes their time and place of composition, circumstances, authors, how they came to be written and audiences addressed. To reconstruct the historical situation is the main task. (McKim 1996:96). This is a tool to be used in understanding a text in its unique context.

1.5.9 Textual criticism

A means of biblical criticism that studies text according to the original wordings or forms (McKim 1996:68). The focus in this is use of words and forms retrieving their original meanings.

1.5.10 Exegesis “interpretation”

The act of interpreting or explaining the meanings of verses or pages of the scripture (McKim 1998). This style seems to be a level above textual criticism because it looks into complete verses and pages for their composite meanings (own)

1.5.11 Gnosticism “Knowledge”

An amorphous movement during the early Church period that featured complex views that focused on the quest to secret knowledge transmitted only to the “enlightened” and marked by the view that matter is evil. Gnostics denied the humanity of Jesus

(McKim 1996:114). Paul seems to be beginning to refer to it in the 1 Corinthians 8: 4-6, though it is said elsewhere that this movement had not began until the third century.

1.5.12 Invocation of Saints

The practice in Roman Catholicism of calling on departed saints for help or intercession (McKim 1996:247). Its relevance in this thesis is that it bears resemblance to the worship of ancestors, that is, invocation of the dead in the African context.

1.5.13 Saint devotion

Honouring and venerating of special significance by various means, including prayers, offerings, pilgrimages, veneration of relics and dedication of churches. These practices are part of the Roman Catholic tradition (McKim 1996:246).

Another notion is that the Church has not yet seriously faced the theological problem of co-existence with other religions and that Christianity is a white man's religion (Tailor, 1914:21). These notions will be discussed later on.

1.5.14 Sacrifice

Something of value offered as an act of worship or devotion to God (McKim 1996:246). In the case of other religions, it would be offerings of any sort in worship to 'other gods'.

1.5.15 Syncretism

Syncretism is the combination or reconciliation of differing beliefs in religion, philosophy or an attempt to effect such compromise between religions. This is the process by which elements of one religion are assimilated into another religion resulting in a change in the fundamental nature of those religions. It is the union of two or more beliefs, so that the synthesised form is a new thing. (Gehman 1989:271).

There is a notion that Christian faith must show it's ability to meet the deep human needs of our time and also make people of different cultural backgrounds feel at home

in the new world. This notion has led some of the African Christians in the East London metropolitan area to find themselves entangled in ancestor cult practices that are performed by non- Christian in their neighbourhood. They are bound to attend, be involved and even participate in such cults in order to uphold and maintain good neighbourhood relationship.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

2.1 The worldview of the concept of life after death in African Communities

In the common African thought, the worldview of survival after death is the idea of a spirit that remains alive and accessible to the living after death. Mbiti (1969: 162) supports the presupposition stated above when he/she states that as soon as a person dies, he/she becomes a “living dead.”

He/she is a spirit in the sense that he/she is no longer in the body and yet he/she retains features, which describe him in physical forms. He/she still retains his personal name so that when he/she appears to human members of him/her family, they recognise him/her as so and so. He/she is counted as part of the family in many ways, even though people know and realise that he/she has forsaken them. When the living dead appears, it is to those within his/her household or family.

Mogoba (1981:52) does not distance himself from the idea of the above author when he states that the Pedi do not die, but death is a bridge to enable a person to pass from one community to another, the living dead are as alive as living parents are.

Here we can see some similarity between Mogoba and Mbiti in the use of the term “living dead.” To both of them the dead is living. But Mogoba (ibid, 52) goes further to say that, conversely, the family refer to their ancestors whenever need arises. Another similarity is that Mogoba speaks of a reference of the living to the ancestors whenever need arises whilst Mbiti (ibid 162) also speaks of the appearance of the dead (living dead) to human members of his family who recognise him/her as so and so.

These ideas lead us to conclude that life after death is a phenomenon that an African lives with, which Hammond-Tooke (1981:23) also refers to by saying, “ the ancestors are omnipresent and all knowing and are the ultimate source of independence.”

On the other hand, Staples (1983:270) maintains that the cult of the ancestors is not based upon a doctrine of the immortality of the soul. Intricate to it however, is a

concept of death, with its systems of mortuary and induction rituals as a transition to a shadowy form of life for a time after death.

2.2 The worldview of the concept of life after death in Ancient Near East

Van der Toorn (1996; 230) who has contributed a lot to the studies in the history and culture of the Ancient Near East maintains that the sacrificial meats offered to the dead, played a role in bringing and keeping the family and clan together in harmony. The reason for referring to Van der Toorn (ibid) is that there are some analogies between the culture of the Ancient Near East and that of contemporary community under study, as far as social life is concerned.

He goes on to say that the dead were believed to take care of their descendants from beyond the grave. Having reached a supernatural state, they used their powers for the good of their families. Not only did they symbolise the identity of that family in the final analysis, they were responsible for its continuing growth and welfare. The common ground the above authors agree upon is the activeness of the dead after death with emphasis to the dead's lineal descendants.

2.3 The African Christian Position

The situation in the East London metropolitan area is such that African Christians are not particularly concerned with the relation between the teaching of the Bible and the traditional Xhosa religious beliefs they still hold. Superficial synthesis of the two traditions is not lacking. It is often said that God and the ancestors work together, with the recognition that the ancestors are on the different plane from that of God.

Ancestor beliefs and rituals are also justified with reference to the commandment to honour one's parents (Exodus 20:12) or to Christian ideas of life after death. (1 Corinthians 15:20) In a general way, traditional belief and ritual are justified by the argument that Jesus said that he did not come to destroy peoples customs (Mt.5: 17) (misinterpreted as he referred to Law and Prophets). In the case studies referred to below, one learns that African Christians believe that their ancestors would send misfortune if they neglected certain important traditional duties or customs. Furthermore, a majority of African Christians also interpret dreams or other

experiences from their ancestors or regarded certain fortune events as blessings from the ancestors. Some are taking an active part in the performance of ancestor ritual. This is a common and a widespread belief across the Xhosa-speaking people as experienced by the writer of the thesis.

Staples (1983:4) views the issue of life after death and the belief in the ancestors as the cult of ancestors which he perceives as influential in the lives of South African blacks in spite of the continuously high rate of modernisation and urbanisation in South Africa and of an ongoing response of South Africans to Christianity.

To Staples (Ibid, 5) many actively practising second and third generation Christians in mainline churches, have a live consciousness of an ancestral presence. He has even a better way of expressing this full swing of African Christians to ancestor cult in these modern days. He states that the attachment to the cult is no less among persons highly involved in church activities than those less involved and that the attachment to ancestor cult is slightly more-among those who are highly involved in churches than among those less involved (Staples, *ibid*).

Although African converts to Christianity thought of themselves as people who had become followers of an entirely new way of life, in practice they were participants in two cultural traditions, their own heritage and that, which had been introduced by the Christian missionary enterprise. Their acceptance of the Gospel was a synthesis between Christianity as they had learnt from missionary agencies with the scriptures on one hand and their traditional existence on the other (Mugambi, 1989:67-69).

In fact, African Christians assert that the belief in ancestors is not unbiblical. They believe that Scriptures such as Exodus 20:12 and 1 Corinthians 15:20 and many other Old and New Testament writings illustrate this. An understanding which is compatible with the New Testament teaching as portrayed in the definition of idolatry.

African Christians consciously or subconsciously have continued to consider their new faith in relation to their past existence, as individuals in contemporary society and as corporate members of their ethnics communities (Mugambi 1989:67-69) African Christians while accepting Christianity did not necessarily forget their ancestral descent. In a study carried out in the Ciskei region, which covers East London Metropolitan area, Oosthuizen (1997:1 30) found that other church members,

while attending church regularly and participating in church activities with considerable zeal, still resort to the pagan ancestor cult in times of crises such as illness or accident.

In a study undertaken by Manona in 1981 (1981: 34 – 38), he is concerned about a relatively recent change in the attitudes of Xhosa Christians towards their ancestors, a development that is apparently leading to the resurgence of the ancestor cult. In his book, “Resurgence of the ancestor cult among Xhosa Christians” he brings into light the fact that practices like birth rituals, mortuary rituals and others that have to do with the living and the dead are being practised by the African Christians of the Xhosa speaking people in increasing measure.

Manona (Ibid, 38-39) lists the causes for the current decline of church influence on practices relating to ancestors as follows:

- ❑ The changing perceptions of the people regarding the role the church is playing at present this was during the apartheid era.
- ❑ The ending of mission control of schools in many places since the introduction of Bantu Education in 1953.
- ❑ The Church is no longer able to provide as much material benefits to its members as it did in the past.
- ❑ The decline of the influence of the white clergy in black congregations in towns and the country.
- ❑ The growth of self –awareness among Blacks in this country. This manifests itself as a development of pride in Black culture and being Black.

2.3.1 The role of the African Independent Churches

Before engaging into the exegesis of 1 Corinthians 8 it is appropriate that mention is made here of some of the practices of the African Independent Churches as they have relate to the subject of ancestor beliefs and practices of African Christians. This is what makes distinct from the rest of the Christian movements.

The position of the AIC’s should be closer to the exegetical aspects of the biblical text of the thesis. The reason being that of exposition of the Early Church in relation to the

present African Christian practices and beliefs concerning idols and eating of food or meat offered to idols.

Oosthuizen (1997:15-16) states that (AIC) movement is not as is usually believed by scholars of South African society, a purely reactive response to colonialism and apartheid but is also a major shaping force of Black South African society. The AIC is a vital movement drawing inspiration from Black Nationalism, traditional Black beliefs about the nature of society and the individual's place there in and an energetic tradition of worship that emphasises not only the spiritual dimension but also the need for social action.

These Churches vary widely in theology and rituals but share certain striking characteristics "viz,"

- They assert vigorously their independence from the missionary churches and are often suspicious of moves towards ecumenism
- In many instances they combine unmistakably Christian traditions and beliefs with traditional African rituals and beliefs
- The majority of their parishioners are black (ibid, 17).

It can thus be assumed from the above AIC exposition, that Black Theology has had an influence in the formation and establishment of this movement.

As the Bible began to be interpreted against the political, socio-economic and cultural lives of the people in which it lived, Black theology, Liberation Theology and Feminist approaches began to emerge in the 20th Century. These had an impact on the construction and establishment of the world. The demand has been on contextual hermeneutics, social location, reading from this place and other new biblical interpretive ways that address the societal needs of today (McKim 1996:419).

The AIC movement, as most scholars agree, was a reaction to both ecclesiastical and political colonialism. By allowing African Christians the freedom to practice Christianity divorced from, the political and cultural repression of the mission churches that brought Christianity to Africa often as legitimisation of colonial repression, the AIC became an important early channel for black self-expression (Oosthuizen 1997:17).

“Ubuntu” is the foundation of the African society overturned by colonialism and apartheid. It derived from the support networks within the extended family, whereby the apotheosis of individual self-expression could be found in service to the family. “Ubuntu” lives on in the AIC movement, where it finds its complement in the essential teachings of Christianity. The success of the AIC’s in this regard is largely as a result of their integration of social emphasis of Christianity with the principle of “ubuntu.” (Ibid, 22-23).

As statistics have shown that the AIC percentage of the total population has increased from 12% in 1970’s to 21% in 1980 and 23% in 1990 (Froise, 1993/94:xi) the geographical area under study is no exception to this increase. This also shows that more African people are moving away from being non-Christians but instead of being Christian members in the missionary founded mainline churches, they rather prefer to affiliate with the AIC because, of its openness to African traditions, customs and culture.

2.4 Anthropological Aspects

The anthropological aspects that will be dealt with in this chapter are those that are pertaining to the ancestral cult and which are practised by African Christians in the East London metropolitan area.

Staples (1983:195) perceives that the ancestors constitute the principal element in the African religion. They are regarded as living in close proximity to the homestead and being vitally interested in all that their descendants do. They are approached in rituals of sacrifice, of prayers and confession.

Many African Christians living in and around East London find themselves entangled in cult practices that are performed by their neighbourhood as it shall be seen in the biographical notes below. The norm is to attend and be involved in such activities in order to maintain good neighbourhood relationships, the so-called community values. In African culture the expectations are that when a neighbour performs a ritual, the neighbourhood should attend even without special invitation.

Even African Christians who do not practise these rituals, by virtue of being neighbours to those who do practise them, find themselves having to attend and sometimes are requested by neighbours to perform certain duties.

2.4.1 Sacrificial Rites

Most of the sacrificial offerings are done in the cattle byre (ebuhlanti), which is regarded as a sacred place, where ancestral spirits live. Analogical to the Old Testament Temple of the Israelites, which consisted of the (i) Assembly Hall, (ii) Holy Place and (iii) Holy of Holies, the Xhosa cattle byre consists of three different sections viz.

(a) The entrance (amaxhanti).

This is where the officiating house elder (inkulu) stands and recites the genealogy of the family lineage concerned and explains all what a ritual is about. Then he goes on to ask the ancestors to accept the sacrifice in return for good health and prosperity. It is customary for the whole congregation of people attending the ceremony not to enter the cattle byre before the ancestors are addressed by 'inkulu'. The only figure that would be found in the byre is the animal to be sacrificed.

(b) The fireplace

This is where the animals are slaughtered as sacrifices. After skinning and opening of the viscera, the tender part under the shoulder blade (intsonyama) of the right foreleg is cut out, roasted in the fire and the family members are called up by 'inkulu' to eat first (ukushwama). The rest of the meat can be divided according to the social status of the home membership viz, men, women, young men, young women, head boys, girls etc. After the ritual sacrifice has been completed, women are given their share of meat, which is usually roasted and cooked, next to the house "egoqweni."

(c) The extreme back area (umthonyama).

This is where the sacrificial meat, blood, homebrew and incense are offered by inkulu to the ancestors, since the ancestors are omnipresent and all knowing and are the ultimate source of dependence (Hammond-Tooke 1981:23). In the understanding of the writer of this thesis, this is the sacred place in the cattle byre, where the spirits reside.

Some of the sacrificial rites that have been observed in the East London metropolitan area among the African Christians are:

(d) Birth ritual (Imbeleko)

Imbeleko is done after a child is born, this may be from 2 years of age and above when the child is able to eat of its own. The purpose of “Imbeleko” is to introduce the new member of the family to the family ancestors for safekeeping. The mother and the child sit on the mat (ukhuko) behind the door of the hut. If the child has no mother, any married woman in the family acts as the mother.

A goat is slaughtered and intsonyama is given to the child. Some words, as usual, are said by inkulu as introductory words. The horns (impondo) of the goat are kept in the hut above the doorpost as a sign to the ancestors that this rite has been performed on behalf of the child.

(e) The Ritual of the necklace (Intambo)

This ritual is performed for girls before or after marriage. Its significance is for them to bear children when they get married. If this ritual is missed and a married woman does not bear children to her husband, she is sent back to her maiden home where the ritual would take place. Some strings from the tail of the old cow are pulled out and spiralled together to form a necklace, which is put around the girl's neck. She is sent back to her husband's family (Emzini wakhe). To be honest, I do not know of any such a woman who was sent back to her husband's family home and who did or did not bear children, nor do I know that the case was barren prior to the performance of

the ritual. Anyway the crux of the matter is that this is one of the ancestral practices performed by the African Christians in and around East London.

(f) The drinking of milk ritual (ukutyisa amasi)

This is commonly used for introducing the newly wed (umakoti) to the ancestors and welcoming her into the new family. After eating "intsonyama" she is free to partake in any type of food prepared by the home, including milk and sour milk.

(g) Occasional beer drinks (Izichenene)

Occasional beer drinking are done by both men and women of the family as thanksgiving to the ancestors after one has struck luck or had a visitation in a dream by ancestors. The head of the family would call the community and of course family and clan members to come and spit (ukutshica) at this home (meaning gathering).

Manona (1981:38-39) reveals that the African Christian converts substitute these rituals for modern names e.g. dinner (idinala), we however feel that this substitution of the rituals for modern names may be due to the fact that food and beverages are usually served on these occasions. On the other hand this may be a way African Christians, who indulge in ancestors cults, make a cover-up so as not to appear as participants in the ancestral beliefs.

The recent trend in some African Christian believers who perform the ancestral rituals is to call the church elder or a cell leader to come and do some opening devotions. Staples (1983:4) and Oosthuizen (1971:1-30) have already explained this sort of practice by African Christians.

The writer of the thesis observes that it would be difficult for both clergy and laymen to oppose such ancestor cults and practices from being done by African Christian members they lead because they would be faced with a majority of opposition from the Church members. Such act would also cause a lot of dissatisfaction and withdrawal of membership from Church participation, a situation the leadership would not like to see happening.

2.4.2 Mortuary Rites

Lamla (1981:14-19) depicts the dead as prepared to live in the spirit world by the Southern Nguni to which the Xhosa speaking communities in and around East London belong. To Lamla (ibid.) the Southern Nguni do not mourn without hope. This hope is revealed in the ritual practices that are performed during and after the burial of the deceased member of the family. Some of these funeral rites that Lamla referred to will be listed below here but the explanation of them is the work of the writer of the thesis, after consultation with the African Christians in and around East London.

(a) Cow accompaniment (inkomo yokhapha)

It is the rite, which involves the slaughtering of a beast during or after the burial of the deceased. The words that are uttered by the officiator are addressed to the dead as if the dead is hearing, e.g. "Siyakukhapha ngalenkomo ukuba uhambe kakuhle uyokuhlala noyihlo mkhulu kwelo lemimoya"(With this ox we accompany you so that you have a safe journey and to be with your fore-fathers in the spiritual world).

There is a strong belief that the spirits of the dead remain with the home environment until this ritual is performed so as to safely accompany the dead to the spirit world, where the forefathers, the ancestors (izinyanya) are.

(b) Washing of spades (ukuhlanjwa kwemihlakulo)

This is normally done a week or so after the burial of the deceased. This is the day where the spades, picks, and shovels, which had been used in the digging of the tomb, are to be put back where they are stored e.g. in a house, shed or store. After they had been used in the digging of the tomb, they had not been taken into the house or been re-used, but left next to the kraal until this washing of spades ritual is performed. The fear is that, if the tools were used prior to their washing ritual, they would bring about illness that would lead to another death in the family. The only exception for them to be used is when death has strike again before the washing ritual.

(c) The burning of rags (ukutshiswa kwempahla)

This refers to the actual burning of the clothes and blankets that the deceased had used especially in the last days of life. Other clothes that are in good nature are distributed among the close relatives e.g. sister-in-laws etc.

(d) Bringing home ritual (ukubuyiswa)

This is a big occasion marked by the slaughtering of an ox and homebrew. In the African Culture the blood always signifies something. By spilling the blood (ukuchitha igazi) on behalf of a deceased spirit is believed to be opening the way for the deceased spirit, to return home not only as a spirit, but also as an ancestor (isinyanya) to whom reference can now be made with regard to the welfare of the lineal family.

2.4.3 Societal rites

The central theme of ancestor belief is not that there is life after death but that the dead continue their involvement with the society of living (Staples, 1983:65). This belief among Africans and African Christians alike is not confined to an individual but is a family and societal affair.

Another example is that when there was drought in 1974 along the Eastern coastline of the Eastern Cape around East London, the Kwelera community called a day of prayer for rain. As I attended the prayer meeting I discovered that different speakers addressed different personalities and “deities” though the word “deity” is used with reservations.

The reason why I refer to deities is because prayers were said together with words of praise and worship to define gods as well as ancestors. Ancestors were called to intervene and if there were societal sins, those were to be forgiven. Sins that were thought to have offended the ancestors were prayed for to be forsaken.

This showed that although ancestors are regarded as acting on behalf of their lineal descendants only (Ibid, 66), there is, however, space for the entire society to appeal to them as overseers of societies, in times of societal distress.

In some societies ancestors become the focus of religious activity. Wherever they are found, ancestors constitute the basic categories of moral and legal thought. This function raises them above the transitory human level and invests them with sacred significance superior and powerful beyond all human challenge. The rights and duties sanctioned by the ancestors both define and regulate basic socio- political relations (Staples, 1983:71).

In the following section we look at case studies, the real life situations of people in the area of East London. It is important to note that the research of this nature had been carried out before among the Southern Ngunis, which the area under review is part of (in Lamla, 1981) and (Manona, 1981). Case studies help at bringing an understanding of a complicated issue and can add strength to what is already known through previous research.

2.5 Case Studies

2.5.1 Case Study 1.

Mrs Makwala a lady teacher staying in Mdantsane and a member of the Methodist Church in Southern Africa with two children, a boy and a girl. Her husband died five years ago. She says, "My husband and I believe in ancestors and in doing things for them, as our lives are dependent upon them. As I am talking to you now, I am preparing for a big feast of bringing back (ukubuyisa) my husband home." I asked her if this coming back home of her husband would be physical, and she answered, "No, his body remains in the grave but his spiritual body will be with us." Then I asked, "What impact will this act of 'ukubuyisa' have on your Christian Values?" She answered, "Oh, no, there is no contradiction between what I am doing and Christianity for even Jesus said that he had not come to destroy our customs but to fulfil them. So my conscience is clear on that, because we have to respect our dead and do these things. I loved my husband very much, I can't neglect him when he is in the spirit world."

I asked again,” What is your position in Church because I see you in a photograph hanging on the wall wearing a full uniform of “umanyano”(woman’s union).” She replied, “Yes that is me on the photo with full uniform of “umanyano”, I am a Methodist and a Cell leader; I am also a convenor of the conferences of “umanyano”, then I said Ndiyabulela mama, enkosi (thank you).

2.5.2 Case Study 2.

Nomntu is a divorcee with two girls and a boy. The elder girl has completed her studies as a journalist. The last-born baby boy is still doing grade 7 at school. The other girl left school and diagnosed HIV positive. She used to get lost several times as she ran away from school. She returns home only when she is ill or reported as such by those who know her mother. Her mother is a lady teacher and a member of Methodist Church with a full uniform of umanyano (Union). “I am tired of this child’s behaviour, I’ve tried everything to help her regain her health but she doesn’t not stay at home in Centane in the Transkei for her people to do all the necessary customs that have to be performed for her. She has told me about dreaming her grand parents (omkhulu) calling her to a place she does not know.” I asked “where is her father now and why don’t you consult him and tell him about your intentions so that he may make a contribution.” “ No, no I cannot do that, I’ve tried to tell him about the health of his child but he told me that I divorced him and he has nothing to do with whatever is under this roof. I am hiring a taxi this weekend to take my child to her homestead. My mother-in-law and my sister-in-law will see what to do, this is their blood relative.

2.5.3 Case Study 3

Ngqosini is an elder in the Church of the Province of South Africa at Duncan Village in East London. I asked if he believed in ancestor worship. “Look sir, I am a black man, an African. The customs, which I grew up and which were practised by my parents cannot be changed by me nor can I depart from them. I grew up at home for instance knowing that when a child is born a birth ritual (imbeleko) has to be performed for that child”. On being asked the purpose of imbeleko, he replied, “it is for the protection of the child by the ancestors against evil spirits. Look now all my

children have undergone the ritual and are all healthy, they only suffer from common cold like any other person”

I asked, “Bawo, do you think that Christianity and ancestor worship are inseparable?” “Mfundisi, he replied,” God never said that we should leave or forsake our customs and traditions. In fact for an example how can we know and respect God when we don’t respect our ancestors?” I think it’s high time that Africans went back to their roots and revive their culture. I am not against the Church, Mfundisi, but a Church that opposes African custom and traditional practices is not good for us, we Africans. We believe in ancestors and perform rituals on their behalf for the restoration of health, peace and prosperity in the land of our forefathers.

2.5.4 Case Study 4.

Radebe, middle-aged man married with four children, two girls and two boys, all staying in Mdantsane. “Mr Radebe your opinion about ancestors and ancestor worship.” “I am glad you came up with this question. I am a black Christian who knows all the customs and traditions of my people but one day I accepted Jesus Christ as my saviour and Lord. I am living a new life now and I have had clashes with my family about the life I am living, that of having no other god before God. I am now living a free life I am no longer bound by customs and traditions. My children are old and all the spirits that are there have influenced some of them and sometimes they tell me to do this or that for them so that they have no debts on ancestors. I always tell them that I do not want to quarrel with God.” “ Would you be offended if I ask to which denomination do you fellowship?” “Not at all, I don’t put my light under the table but on the table to give light to all in the house; I am in the Assemblies of God. I am a born-again, Christian.” “What about initiation of boys to manhood”? “That has nothing to do with ancestor worship. In fact it was commanded by God to the children of Israel and therefore we who believe in Christ are free to perform circumcision in God’s way, as long as we do not sacrifice anything to the dead, according to scriptures.

2.5.5 Case Study 5.

Miss Zola, a young Anglican Church member graduated at Fort Hare for a B.Ed degree. She asked me to drive her to Kwelera where her late father was laid to rest at the village cemetery. We drove for 150 km from Alice to Kwelera on the other side of East London. When we got to the village cemetery we stopped and she asked me to wait for her in the car. She then went round and round in the cemetery looking for her late fathers grave. Eventually she stopped and I observed her looking closer for the writing on the tombstone.

She then knelt-down on the bottom of the grave and began to address her father. I could hear what she was saying because I was about ten (10) metres from her and had opened the window on the driver's side. Some words she uttered were," Father, I'm grateful to have been born by you for you for you are very kind to me. Now that you have been able to assist me in completing my degree, I have come to tell you that an ox will be slaughtered and a traditional home brew made as a thanks-giving sacrifice to you. Thank you father. Rest in Peace.

2.5.6 Comments

The case studies have shown that ancestor beliefs and practices within the Xhosa speaking people around East London, particularly among the African Christians are an ongoing phenomenon that the present day Church in South Africa has to deal with. The case studies in this thesis attempt to be indicators of the African Christian Believers' stand point of view in regard to ancestor beliefs and practices under discussion. The five cases have been randomly chosen and were met and interviewed as circumstances prevailed. Others like the fifth one was met when she asked the researcher for assistance and to accompany her to fulfil her desire to visit her late father's grave in Kwelera, a village 25 km out of East London.

Two cases were from Mdantsane, a township 20 km from East London. One was from Duncan Village one of the oldest locations in East London. The other was a single lady living in Amalinda, which is one of the suburbs of East London. Although they were randomly chosen, they represented a wide area of East London which is predominantly Xhosa speaking.

As they were all Christians not by standards but by their confession, the interviews fitted well for the purpose of this thesis in that all but one of the cases were in favour of ancestor beliefs and practices. This is a proof of the fact that African Christians do have a belief in doing things for the dead whilst still holding on to Christianity. I would suggest that in dealing with this issue the church should focus on a revision of the “confession of faith” where maybe the adding of the suffix ‘only’ after the word ‘believe’ in the Christian Confession “I believe in God the Father.” It should then read like, “I believe only in God, the Father”. The Catechism and Christian teaching can take it from there in explaining the importance and responsibility of holding to monotheism.

It is not the intention of this thesis to give guidance to church education but a recommendation emanating from an approved occurrence that can be prevented by one way or another, that need not be discarded at face value. If the case studies reveal that there is a problem of ancestor worship within the Church, then it is the duty of the Church to solve that problem.

2.6 Preliminary Conclusion

In this chapter, ancestor beliefs and practices have been explicated, in order to make us aware of the phenomenon of syncretism that manifests itself in the African Christian Churches in the East London Metropolitan area. In the last chapter the critical evaluation of the research project on African Christian beliefs and practices on ancestors, in the East London Metropolitan area will be presented as an overall conclusion of the thesis.

The main themes that are discussed from the beginning to the end of this chapter are those of Christianity and idolatry in the context of contemporary African Christians in and around East London. In this thesis an effort has been taken to make an overview of scholar’s thoughts on the theme of ancestor beliefs and its impact on the lives of African Christians with particular focus on Xhosa-speaking African Christians in the East London Metropolitan area. The main question has been, “to what extent can a Christian be involved in ancestor beliefs and practices.” This has opened the way for

getting other scholars views on the concept of life after death, with special reference to the African peoples.

The African Christian position has been explained to take a position of non-concern with the relation between the teaching of the Bible and the traditional Xhosa religious beliefs they still hold. This African Christian position has led to the accommodation of a culture within a culture.

This has been termed as “syncretism” which appears to be acceptable or even sometimes overlooked by the Church and clergy in the geographical area under review.

Manona (1981:38-39) however lists the causes for the current decline of church influence on practices relating to ancestors. Among other causes listed by Manona, (ibid.) is growth of self-awareness among blacks. This may be viewed as socio-political reasons for African Christians to believe and practice ancestor cult.

There are also some misinterpreted biblical texts that justify these beliefs and practices, among the contemporary African Christians in the East London Metropolitan area. The anthropological aspects in the thesis serve to highlight the different types of rites practiced by Africans in general including the African Christian in the geographical area under review. The nucleus of African ancestral belief and practices is embedded in these rituals, which identify the African as an African among many nations surrounding him/her.

The community around him/her recognises and accepts him/her as a fellow citizen and a community member on the basis of his/her loyalty to these rites. If one practices them one is honoured but if one refuses to practice them one is alien and is always looked at with suspicion.

This part of the chapter illustrates how an African is attached to the ancestors as shown in the practice of rituals in all the social stages of one's life viz. at birth, initiation to manhood or womanhood and in death. A portion of the chapter has been contributed to the position and possible influence of the African Independent

Churches. How they came about and their contribution to the African Christian beliefs and practices in ancestry, as a result of their attachment to Black Theology, has also been explained in this chapter. The chapter also reveals the common characteristics of the African Independent Churches in spite of their wide variations in theology and rituals. It also shows their growth statistically from 12% in 1970 to 23% by 1990, giving a summation that the question of ancestor beliefs and practices by African Christian members is bound to escalate in years to come.

The last part of the chapter is very important in augmenting what has been argued in the previous chapter. Though the number of cases presented is minimal, they serve to signify the trend of syncretising the two religions comfortably. The definition of Christianity given by Gresham (1951: 18 – 21), which understands Christianity as life and not doctrine, with doctrine merely as its symbolic intellectual expression is important in this regard. These Christians do not practise these aspects of their culture and religion simply as a symbolic intellectual expression but as a religion that stands parallel to the Christianity. Christianity then demands a break from the past practices, and that can include ancestor worship (2 Corinthians, 5:17)

Chapter 3

Exegetical Study

3.1 Introduction

1 Corinthians 8:4 “With reference, then to the eating of meats offered to idols: we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is no God but one.” Once one reads the above text, one is left with the question whether Christians must totally refrain from eating anything that was offered in the temples to the pagan gods- an every day practice that would be hard to eschew (Orr, WF and Walther JA 1986:229).

The second question that needs to be answered or which this thesis is attempting to answer is whether the present-day Christian believers should not refrain from eating meat that is offered to idols. There can be no direct answer to both questions. An attempt to answer these questions calls for an in depth investigation into the socio-cultural and economic life of the early church in Corinth in relation to the Church of today. This therefore requires that the whole text of 1 Corinthians 8 be investigated with the view of finding out what really was the problem with the Corinthian Church. This may lead us into finding the comparison between the early and present day Church which will further give us a clue as to whether ancestor belief and practices among African Christian Believers in and around East London is justifiable or not.

3.2 Selected Text for Exegesis (1 Corinthians 8:4-6)

1 Corinthians 8 is selected for this thesis because of its probable bearing on idolatry as practiced by the Corinthian Church and that the monotheistic principle as a biblical ethic upon which the Christian Church was built, is brought into light, in the contrast to polytheism which is supposedly reflected in the eating of idol food by Christians in Corinth. This may be relevant in addressing the problem of ancestor beliefs and practices among the African Christians in the East London Metropolitan area. I am however aware of the fact that there are other biblical texts that refer to idolatry and all that is pertaining to it. There seems to be similarities yet also differences in practices between the Corinthian Church and that of Christian Community under

study as far as the eating of idol meat is concerned, hence there was need for the addressing of the problem in the Corinthian Church which I think calls for the same for the East London African Christian Community.

3.3 Historical and Social background

3.3.1 About the audience of 1 Corinthians 8

Corinth was a Greco-Roman city, occupied by Greeks, Romans, Jews, and Gentiles and later by Christians. Feasts held in temples were common events in the daily life of the city (Hays 1997:136-137).

Paul founded the Church in Corinth around 51 CE (Bassler, 1998:411). The diverse combinations of four elements constituted pluralism: Mediterranean culture, Roman rule, Hellenistic civilization and the religious symbols of Judaism (Johnson 1999:21). Training in rhetoric was the staple of education; both letters and morals were learned through the imitation of textual and living examples. Greek was the language of trade and government, of philosophy and religion. Johnson maintains that religious syncretism was the tool of Hellenization where local gods were systematically identified with their Greek counterparts. The idea was to reduce local allegiances in favour of more universal ones (ibid 25).

The religious expression of Corinth was as diverse as its population. The internal problem in the Corinthian Church was between the weak and the strong over the question of market place food (Fee, 1989:359). The social significances of meals in the Greco-Roman society were a central focus of social intercourse. Not only was food a significant marker of social status, but dining was also a primary means for social advancement in winning favours and benefits from ones superiors (Cheung 1999:35). The central question that the Corinthian Church asked Paul to address was whether or not Christians are permitted to eat food sacrificed to idols. For a newly converted Christian in Greco- Roman cities this was not simply a religious, but also a social problem. Such meat, which was offered for sale and served at family celebrations, at gatherings of private associations and clubs or at public festivals had passed in one form or another through religious rites. (Harper's Bible Commentary 1988:1084). For the wealthier and more socially active members of the congregation

there could be serious disadvantages if they avoided shrine meals, since these had much more serious civic rather than sacred connotations (Johnson 1999:304). Members of the community who came from a low-status background seem to have agreed that they could consume such sacrificial food because they all have the religious insight and knowledge that an idol has no real existence since there is no God but one (v. 4)(ibid). Because Jews believed that it was idolatrous to eat such meat, they obtained the privilege to slaughter their animals and sell their own meat to other Jews. However it was almost impossible for newly converted Christians who were not Jewish to avoid the social occasions at which such food was offered. More important, for many poor citizens the meat served at public feasts was generally the only meat available to them, since meat was very expensive (Harper's Bible Commentary 1988:1084).

3.3.2 About the author of 1 Corinthians 8

Paul's Hellenic-Judaism background is of vital importance as it might have influenced his way of dealing with the situation at Corinth. He himself speaks vociferously of his Jewish and probably pharisaic credentials (Phil. 3:5). According to Acts 22:3, He studied in Jerusalem under the famous rabbi Gamaliel 1. Paul claims that he was advancing in Judaism beyond many Jews of his own age and was extremely zealous for the tradition of his fathers (Gal.1: 14) (Cheung 1999:78).

However, great may have been the Jewish influence of Paul's thought, his practice was in most ways typically Hellenistic. One feature distinguished Paul's group from the rest of the Greco-Roman society, is their exclusiveness based on inherited Jewish Monotheism and the conviction that only Jesus is Lord (Keck 1988:14-15). Hence at least in regard to food, Paul's attitude was typical among Jews (ibid). Paul's letters then are highly rhetorical.

They are written for a purpose to affect the thought and actions of a particular audience (Cousar 1996:37). But rhetoric is an ancient and honoured practice. It is simply the disciplined art of persuasion, "that quality in discourse by which a speaker or writer who seeks to accomplish his purposes." Any speaker or writer who seeks to persuade an audience to think or act in a certain way, is engaged in rhetoric, whether

conscious of it or not, whether effective or not (ibid 36). Paul in the letter to the Corinthians seems to have applied an epideictic type of speech in the rhetoric, in order to win the confidence of the listeners (ibid).

One of the more fruitful investigations into the style of Paul's letters has to do with the literary device called the diatribe. The diatribe in the hands of Paul becomes a very effective method of teaching. The audience is taken into account in the instruction and is accorded a prominent role in the presentation. The style is thoroughly dialogical (ibid 43). It more clearly reflects the instructional context where the teacher guides the student by responding to natural questions and possible misunderstanding that arise about the subject matter (ibid 42) (1 Corinthians 8:10-13). I feel that this was the way Paul tackled the problem of idol meals at Corinth.

3.4 Towards understanding the genre and structure of 1 Corinthians 8

Paul distinguishes immediately between a knowledge that "puffs up" and a love that "builds up" (8:1). However Paul begins by recognising the liberty of the Christian and admits that it is true that food does not change anyone's state before God. But here again this right cannot be the rule for a person's conduct. The Christian has to reckon with his brother. He goes on to argue that knowledge as such cannot be the Christian principle because not all have that knowledge. The wrong use of Christian liberty in eating sacrificial meat may become a stumbling block to the weak brother/sister. Therefore love (1 Corinthians 12-14) for the brethren requires that we reckon with the difficulties of the weak (Grosheide 1979:195).

What Paul wanted to achieve at Corinth was the establishment of love not knowledge as a basis for a true Christian ethos of unity and harmony. The main thrust of Paul's argument lies in Chapter 8 v 4 with his assertion that an idol is nothing in the world and that there is one God. He then uses the strong terms 'gods' and 'lords' in Chapter 8 v 5 to show that the 'gods' and 'lords' of pagans are not, in fact, gods, however real they might seem to pagans.

The fundamental question underlying all these issues is whether monotheistic faith by definition sanctions pluralism (as the gnostic group at Corinth contended) or whether

monotheistic faith requires exclusivity, expressed in clear separation from the symbolic world of pagan culture (as the weak contended) (Hays, 1997: 136 – 137).

To Paul, worship is desperately a serious matter and worshipping a false god produces disastrous consequences. (Rom 1:18-23). To believe in one God means that one must worship only one God and avoid any participation in anything, which includes or implies even marginal worship of anything else. (Orr and Walther 1976:235).

In 1 Corinthians: 8 therefore, Paul is concerned about weaker believers being destroyed by being drawn away from church and back to idol worship. The social dimensions of the chief problem tackled in 1 Corinthians 8-10 are obvious. It is the problem caused by members of the new Christian community who ate food which had been offered to idols (those whose conscience is strong), by so doing they encourage other believers who thought that food sacrificed to idols was contaminated (those whose conscience is weak) to act against their conscience (by eating such food themselves) that is to act in self destructive way (8-11) whether by denying their (albeit weak) faith or by putting themselves into partnership with or under control by demons (10:20-21) (Dunn 1995: 57-58). Dunn is able to pick up that the problem with certain Corinthian Christians is that they were confident of their superior knowledge (idol do not really exist 8.4) and felt no qualms in eating meat which had been sacrificed to idols (Ibid: 35).

3.5 Rhetorical and Theological Aspects of 1 Corinthians 8

Though Paul's letters are the earliest that we have from the Christian Community, letter writing was a common means of communication throughout the Greco-Roman world and became a characteristic literary form in early Christianity. The last third of the twentieth century has brought significant advances in our understanding of Ancient letterform and its adaptation by Paul. Paul, Deissman contended, wrote true letters and not epistles. They were directed to specific situations, not repeated, and were not to be compared with the literary art of an Epicurus or Aristotle. Paul's letters emerged almost spontaneously in the midst of a storm and stress of his wandering life, which was so rich in moving experiences. They are misjudged, Cousar argued, when they are regarded as treatises or literary production (Cousar 1976:24-25).

Though rhetoric and letter writing were separate disciplines, apparently the impact on rhetoric on written communication developed gradually, until by the first century letters functioned not only as a means of communication but also as sophisticated instruments of persuasion and media for displaying literary skill.

The employment of rhetoric would have been natural for Paul, since his letters were written to be read aloud in congregations (see Col.4: 16) (Ibid 38). Vs.4 takes us back to vs.1, “So then, about eating food sacrificed to idols: We know that an idol is nothing at all in the world and that there is no God but one” (Oxford NIV Scofield Study Bible 1967). Again we read the words “We know” followed by a sentence which is true to itself (cf. Rom.3: 30) but which nevertheless seems out of place in this context, for Paul has just stated that knowledge puffs up (Grosheide 1979:191).

Knowledge that Paul refers to in this second instance is knowledge that Christians should have had when they received and accepted Jesus as the Lord and Saviour, the knowledge that there are no other gods besides God the Father from whom all things came and for whom we live (vs.5-6). Paul gives his own opinion that as the Corinthians had accepted monotheism and although idols do not really exist and that there is one God, nevertheless there are many so-called gods and lords. The Corinthians should not eat food offered to idols because they might be misunderstood as believing in idols (Sanders 1991:35), which is polytheism.

Paul inherited from Judaism two principal theological views: “there is one God; God controls the world” (Ibid 34). This inheritance is revealed in his persuasions of the Corinthian congregation into monotheism by his emphasis on one God. Verse 7, “It is not everyone however, who has this knowledge since some have become so accustomed to idols until now, they still think of the food they eat as food offered to an idol; and their conscience being weak, is defiled” (The Harper Collins Study Bible). This verse clearly forms a distinct junction in the section and introduces a new departure in Paul’s line of argumentation. Paul is of the opinion that not everyone possesses this knowledge.

A distinction between “this knowledge” in verse 7a and “knowledge” in 1a can be identified as “this knowledge” in 7a has an article “this.” The presence of the definite

article does suggest at least the possibility of a more specific type of knowledge than that in verse 1a and refers to the content of vs. 4-6. Not everyone at Corinth had the knowledge that 'an idol' is nothing in the world and that there is no god except one 'v.4' (Newton 1998:290). Paul then goes on to explain in some detail that some of the Corinthian believers had for some time been, and still were so familiar with idols (v 7) meaning that they were still so familiar with idols that when they ate food, they ate it as 'food offered to idols'. In other words to these people the idol still had significance and to eat food offered to these 'idols' was, for them, in a sense involvement in idolatry or, "they eat food as really offered to idols." The result is that their weak consciences are defiled (ibid 291).

Although no longer idolaters themselves, they were nevertheless Christians who at one time had been pagans and who had lived in a city full of idolatry. It is assumed that when they came in touch with idols again they were carried back to their former life (Grosheide 1979:194). The example made by Grosheide is that a former drunkard must stay away from strong drink altogether. Even so the ex-pagan cannot yet look upon meat offered to idols as ordinary meat. When he/she eats such meat it still is sacrificial meat to him/her and puts him/her in touch with idols. This makes his/her way of eating sinful. His/her conscience is defiled, he/she pollutes him/herself. His/her conscience is weak; it falls into a trap (Ibid).

In verse 8, Paul goes on to say, "Food will not bring us closer to God, we are no worse off if we do not eat, and no better off, if we do." Just as Paul had done previously, he begins by recognising the liberty of the Christians and admits that it is true that food does not change anyone's state before God. In verse 9, he issues a warning, which although does not affect the contention of verse 8, nevertheless mentions the abuse that could be made of it (ibid). The overall thrust of the verse points towards the idea that food is a neutral item in the relation between believers and God.

Food and the eating of it, in and of itself, does not affect, let alone determine, a believer's relationship with God (Newton 1997:294). Newton quotes Barret's attempt to reconstruct the 'strong' argument in the following way. If we eat sacrificial food

we lose nothing of our Christian status or Christian reward; if we do not eat, but abstain as the weak Christians do on rigorist grounds we gain no advantage.

Another way of viewing v.8 of course is to say that it represents not only Paul's correction of the position of the 'strong', but also the very position of the 'weak' themselves. Although verse 8 may appear to be neutral and impartial it is nevertheless feasible to read it as portraying the position of the 'weak' in showing that it is actually better to refrain from eating sacrificial food (Ibid).

In verse 9, Paul then develops the theme of his concern for believers with weak consciences. Verses 9-13 constitute Paul's explanation of why some people are in spiritual danger over this issue of sacrificial food. He goes on to say, "But take care that this liberty of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak. For if others see you who possess knowledge, eating in the temple of an idol, might they not, since their conscience is weak, be encouraged to the point of eating food sacrificed to idols? (v.10).

To, Paul the Christian who acts from courageous knowledge of the truth must beware of causing a brother to misunderstanding. A knowledgeable Christian may even join in a banquet in an idol temple precinct, and such participation may be a way of asserting that idol-offered food means nothing whatever. But if there is a brother who perceived what the other is doing as participation in the favour of the idol, a brother for whom the food has numinous power, he may be led to a new venture in idolatry or a belief that somehow he can accommodate his Christian faith into idol worship. That weak brother is also an object of Christ's total concern. To be a cause of another's downfall then, is a sin against Christ in as much as Christ's purpose towards that person is love (Orr and Walther 1976:235).

Although Paul is convinced that the free person is right, he says that if his own attitude toward food causes another Christian to violate conscience, he will become a vegetarian (v. 13). True freedom is not a matter of everyone seeking his or her own good (doing one's thing unless it infringes upon another) but a matter of seeking the well being of one another. Love is more than doing well as an act of charity; it is an act for the well being of the brother's or sister's relation to conscience and to God (Keck 1988:89). Verse 11-13, "so by your knowledge, those weak believers for whom Christ died are destroyed.

But when you thus sin against members of your family and wound their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ” (v. 12). “Therefore if food is a cause of their falling, I will never eat meat so that I may not cause one of them to fall” (v.13). Christ identified himself with strong and weak alike (vs. 11-12) “the strong”, therefore, must limit their freedom for the sake of others.

Willingly giving up a position of strength for one of weakness is the pattern of exchange that becomes shorthand for the gospel of the crucified Messiah (see 1:17-25) a pattern Paul himself exemplifies (v. 13) (Johnson 1999:304).

So, it is clear to us, that there was conflict over moral practices in the Corinthian Church. The Apostle Paul as the founder leader of this church, had to address the situation and probably find a solution that would be a Christian standard of living as revealed to him by God through the Holy Spirit. The diversity of cultures had an impact on the issue of moral behaviour within the Corinthian Church. There were also implications of wealthy and poverty stricken members of the community. Public and professional duties virtually required the networking that occurred through attending and sponsoring such events (e.g. neighbourhood social courtesy)(Hays 1997:136-7). These sacrificial meals had social significance viz.

- Winning favours
- Expression of friendship
- Fellowship

(Newton 1998:228) asserts that Paul must have realized that, there was no absolute solution to the issue of idol food. We can immediately make note of two differences in his reference to knowledge as compared to his first mention of it in 1 Corinthians 8:1a, in 1 Corinthians 8:7 he states that however not all possess this knowledge. Not everyone at Corinth had the knowledge that an idol is nothing in the world and that there is no God except one (v.14). Then Paul goes on to explain in detail that some of the Corinthian believers had for some time been and still were “accustomed” to idols.

The term “accustomed” can mean, habitual intercourse, acquaintance or intimacy or simply habit/custom. The main thrust of Paul’s argument is that, such believers were

still so familiar with idols that when they ate food, they ate it as food offered to idols. The result is that their weak consciences are defiled. They have not yet reached consciousness of the “knowledge” (vs. 4) which other Corinthian believers have already attained viz that an idol is nothing in the world and that there is no God but one (ibid. 290).

3.6 Literary Aspects

Suppose we were to interpret the above text in the way Paul tried to solve the problem of “food sacrificed to idols” in our situation of beliefs and practices in ancestry among the African Christians in the East London metropolitan area, we would be faced with a lot of questions surrounding the word “knowledge.” It would seem that many people (African Christians) would do many things under the umbrella word “knowledge” as was the case with the Early Church. Orr and Walther (1976:234) argue that eating idol offering may be the same for some people as bowing down before an image. They are either acting out of residual belief in the idol or contradicting the requirements to worship God alone.

In the next argument (Ibid, 135) they perceive that a knowledgeable Christian may even join in a banquet in an idol temple, and such participation may be a way of asserting that idol offered food means nothing whatsoever, But if there is a brother who perceive what the other is doing as a participation in the favour of the idol, a brother for whom the food has numinous power, he may be led to a new venture in idolatry or a belief that somehow can accommodate his Christian faith to idol worship. It doesn't seem that the beliefs and practices in ancestors by the African Christians in and around East London are based on this “knowledge” more than on socio-cultural background.

However there are some African Christians who do not indulge in sacrificial rites performed on behalf of the dead although they attend and eat such food when invited, holding to v.8 of the text, “ Food will not affect our standing with God.” We neither lack anything if we do not eat, nor do we have abundance if we do eat (v9). But Paul goes on to say, but see to it that this liberty of yours, does not somehow become a stumbling block to those who are weak (v11). Then because of your “knowledge” the

one who is weak is perishing, the brother for who's sake Christ died. Paul seems to hold that idol meat is actually harmless while nonetheless encouraging the enlightened to abstain for the sake of other people's scruples (Hays 1997:134-135).

The new word is "weak" as though those with knowledge and therefore participated in the sacrificial foods, were the strong and those which were not enlightened and therefore look at such participation as idolatry, as "weak."

In the first place, the idolatry that was practiced by the pagans in the Greco-Roman world is not similar to what we perceive idolatry (ancestor beliefs and practises) among the Xhosa speaking people in the East London Metropolitan Area. The gods of the pagan world were those that Paul came into face to face with, e.g. the case of Areopagus in the town of Athens in Greece and the empire worship in the Roman world (Act 17:16-23, Eph 19:23-34, Act 14:11-13). The issue with the African Christian question on ancestor beliefs and practises, is about boundaries between Church and Culture, and whether should, Christians fit into the social world of their surrounding culture or must they withdraw altogether from normal, social practises that present participation in symbolic orders alien to the Gospel? Where are the lines to be drawn between acceptable accommodation to realities of the culture and unacceptable compromise (Ibid, 137)?

Derek Newton (1998:228) also emphasises that there is one God. He goes on to stress that the gods and lords of the pagans are not in effect gods, however real they might seem to pagans (V5). He sees a contrast between many gods and lords of pagans and our God the Father and Lord of Jesus Christ. With the gods and lords of pagans could be included a wide spectrum of beings such as upper world gods, underworld gods emperors, heroes, divinised ancestors to various degrees. In his "Theological pitfalls in Africa" Bryang Kato (1975. 70) refute Mbiti's advocating that non-Christian beliefs be left to exist and the impression that both Christianity and non-Christian religions are valuable and deserve co-existences. He goes on to quote the Apostle Paul in (2 Corinthians 5:17) "and for anyone who is in Christ he is the new creation the old creation has gone and now the new one is here.

Kato (Ibid) perceives that Paul said this only because he firmly believed that even the most religious person was considered dead and without God. The question put by Glasswell and Fashole-Luke (1994: 209) is whether Africans do worship their dead ancestors or venerate them. Glasswell and Fashole-Luke (ibid 211) mention Harry Sawyer as one who has made a strong case for the view that ancestral rite; practices and prayers constitute the true worship. This view has been controversial among theologians for sometime, but looking deeper into this question one is left with no alternative but to believe and accept the fact that Africans do worship their ancestors. This is similar to the Roman Catholicism “invocation of saints” by calling on departed saints for help or intercession. With the African central beliefs and practices, one does not merely call upon them to intercede when there is crisis only, but to maintain good relations with them, one has to honour, venerate, and offer prayers and sacrifices as well. Since this belief and practices seem to be an ongoing phenomenon in the individual’s life, we conclude that it falls under the category of “worship.”

In the case of Corinthian Church, Mitchel (1991:237) highlights the rhetoric of reconciliation that Paul applies in solving the problems of idol meats, freedom and group uniting. Here she is emphasising how the Christian community can retain its internal unity faced with pressures from the outside culture that put the community apart, hence he emphasises “love” over and above “knowledge.” A community is divided on this particular issues, with some saying that there is nothing wrong with eating meat which had been sacrificed to idols and others arguing against the practice on grounds of the prohibition of idolatry. Paul tried to hold two balls in the air by allowing the eating of idol meats unless in a particular situation it hurts the fellow Christians but condemning idolatry. This is because Paul’s overriding concern here is not merely idol meat in itself but the impact of the conflicts over idol meat idol meat on the concord of the church community. Paul therefore does not contradict himself in (8:1-13, 10:23, 11:1 and 10:1-22) because in those treatments, Paul distinguishes between idolatry cult meat participation and the eating of idol meat. He prohibits the first (8:10-13, 10:7, 14 and 20-22) but not the second (unless it harms other Christians) (Ibid 242).

Further, the case study research carried out at Duncan Village in East London directed to African Christians, it was found out that people had different opinions regarding

eating of meat sacrificed to the dead (izinyanya). The majority were for and very few were against the practice. The ratio can be estimated as being 3:1. The love theory advocated in dealing with differences in the church concerning idolatry at Corinth, does not seem to be applicable to the situation of African Christian beliefs and practices in ancestor in and around East London area, reason being that, unlike the Corinthian Church which had diversity of races, cultures and languages, the African Christians under discussion are Xhosa speaking and are from a common culture and race. It would therefore be wise of the church to come up with a solution that is relevant to the African Christians problem in the geographical area where the research is carried out.

Ro (1985: 329) in a “working document towards a Christian approach to ancestor practices” (within an Asian context) points out the biblical teaching of honouring parents to establish a peaceful family. Bong further states that the concept of “sheol” in the Old Testament did not give clear status of the dead until further revelations were given in the New Testament. However both the Old Testament and New Testament clearly warn against any attempts to offer sacrifices to the dead in order to invoke blessings for the living. Christians according to Bong cannot worship anything or anyone other than God. Christian families live in two dimensions of a vertical relationship to God and a horizontal relationship to one another and to the world. Scriptures prohibit any attempt to communicate with the spirits of the departed as seen in the account of Saul’s attempt to communicate with Samuel through a medium of Endor (1 Sam. 28) also (Lev. 19:31,20:6). All acts of worship and prayers to the dead are forbidden. Ro (ibid.) maintains that the idea of Mary and Saints interceding for those “in purgatory” has no biblical support and should be rejected. He pleads that we must act with a good conscience and with the due respect to our weaker brother or sister (1 Corinthians 8; 10; Romans 14). We also hold to the position that the Christian in the context of various cultures should not try to culturalize the Gospel but to transform the cultures according to the teaching of the scripture (ibid, 9).

Pickett Raymond (1997:116) is of the opinion that the Corinthians have simply spiritualised this cultural value. Without undermining their freedom, then Paul challenges their individualism by setting forth the norms of considering the community. He employs the metaphor of building up in order that their emphasis on

the knowledge, power and freedom of the individual might be superseded by his emphasis on the mutual responsibility believers have to one another.

The Corinthians are to understand themselves as related to one another and to Christ by virtue of the fact that Christ died for them (v. 12) (Ibid, 117). In (v.11) Paul according to Raymond (ibid, 117) designate the one who's conscience is weak as a brother for whom Christ died. He invokes the symbol of Christ 's death in order to re-establish the common basis of their life together. The death of Christ along with his resurrection is the foundational symbol of the community and so defines the basis of community members' relationship to one another. In contrast to the knowledge and freedom which served to distinguish the strong from the weak, the Cross here symbolises the ontological reality which is the ground of their unity in Christ.

The vertical and horizontal dimensional relationship of Christians to God and fellowmen respectively, does not have any significance as far as the African Christians, regarding ancestor beliefs and practices. Everyone seems to act according to one's convictions about the existence of ancestors and their value to the welfare of the people. Similarly the theology of the death and resurrection of Christ as the basis for Christian community members' relationships to one another is also, to a certain extent, not the foundational symbol of the African Christian Community under study. The driving power behind ancestral beliefs and practices among the African Christians of the East London Metropolitan area, among other things and from the results of interviews carried out during the research, point to historical, socio-cultural, and political aspects. Most people interviewed would refer to these aspects. The political changes also contributed to the "back to the roots" and 'African Renaissance" slogans, which mean that African people must revive their Culture.

Syncretism is the word that fits in describing the incorporation, transplantation or grafting of two things together in our case resulting in the synthesis of Christian beliefs with those of ancestors. As already stated in the preceding chapters that the Independent African Churches have emerged to counter the Western styled main-line churches by emphasising "African Tradition", in worship and liturgy, where more African culture has been brought into the church.

Maimela's (1981:121) argues that African religious views have not been fully discarded by Africans and to understand the emergent African Christianity, resulting

from cross-fertilization between the Christian and African ethos, the Church needs to acknowledge the viability of African religions and to enter into dialogue with them. We perceive that the dialogue between Christianity and African religions would not bring about a solution to the problem of ancestor belief and practices (idolatry) practiced by African Christians in and around East London. These are two different religions that are parallel to each other, with different backgrounds of history. However syncretism seems to be the alternative way of keeping the African Christians in the Church. The 1st Century believers were Jews who also wanted to fashion the Church or Christianity into Judaism. This proved not to be acceptable to the Apostles, hence the council meeting at Jerusalem (Acts 15) where the Gentiles were given Christian ethics as a guide (v. 20 and Rom.2: 17-28).

Nyamiti (1984:15) is of the opinion that, there is no uniformity system of beliefs on ancestors in Black Africa. This is where the difference lies between Christianity and ancestor cult. Christianity has a uniform system of beliefs. If there be any diversity, it is diversity in unity. On the other hand, ancestor cult has a diversity of forms even within the same clan, tribe or nation. According to Nyamiti (ibid.16) the anger of the ancestors is usually appeased through prayers and rituals in the form of food and drinks.

Here again, the difference between Christianity and ancestor cult can be noticed in that, God of the Christians is not appeased by offering food and drink to Him. The different traditions in the Bible have specific view on sacrifice of spirit and body (Ps.51: 17; Rom.12: 1), which are the sacrifices of man to God. To obey is better than sacrifices (Is.15: 22) God desires mercy not sacrifice and acknowledgement of Him rather than burnt offerings (Hosea, 6: 6).

Ferguson (1993:582) explains that what is unique to Christianity is Jesus Christ. He was what was essential to its beginning and remains central to what it is. This is so in a historical sense. His person and work are what was unique to Christianity.

If the African Christians in the geographical area under review do not seek or show this uniqueness, there would definitely be no difference between themselves as Christians and the world out there. The world around is looking to the Christian for the difference between the two and finds no answer because the beliefs and practices in the world are found among those who claim to be Christians.

Noboru Yamaguchi (1985:52) maintains that, a Christian still remains a member of his earthly family after conversion and should honour and obey his or her parents (Eph. 6:1-2). But this command does not imply ancestor worship. Christians living in this heathen world must be careful not to compromise biblical teaching by worshipping ancestors. He goes on to quote (Rom. 12:1-2) "I appeal to you therefore my brethren, by the mercies of God to present your bodies as a living sacrifice holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. "Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect." Here we can add that although the Jews were proud of Abraham as their ancestor, (Mt. 3:9) they never worshipped him.

3.7 Preliminary Conclusion

Chapter 4 has been dealing with the actual text 1 Corinthians 8:1-4 but the overview of the whole of chapter 8 has been into consideration. This is because of the extensiveness of the meaning of the actual text: 1 Corinthians 8:4-6 where some of the questions in the text are found to be answered in other verses of the chapter. It has been found that there is an intertwinement of theological ideas within the whole chapter about the question of "eating of meats offered to idols."

For this reason, important concepts and keywords that would now and then be mentioned in the thesis had to be explained prior to the exegesis of the text. These explanations of the keyword or important concepts contribute positively to the hermeneutical expression of the text and thus making it possible for the readers' understanding.

A socio-historical background of the Corinthian Church with the concept of sacrificial meals and their social significance to the community has also been explained in the chapter.

The Rhetorical and Theological Aspects of the text in chapter 4 of this thesis, is a long discussion that is trying to conceptualise Paul's teaching and rhetoric statements to the Corinthian Church, in relation to the beliefs and practices of the African Christian communities in and round East London. Similarities in beliefs and practices have been found to exist between the Early Christian communities at Corinth and the

contemporary ones in the East London metropolitan area. It has also been detected that differences also existed between the Early Christian Church in Corinth and the East London African Christian members especially with regard to concepts like “Knowledge, freedom, strong and weak.”

Literary, scholars consulted deal extensively with monotheistic issues and that non-Christian beliefs cannot be left to co-exist with Christianity as some writers advocate for. The controversy of “ancestor worship” or “veneration” has explicitly been explained and the end result is that ancestors are worshiped in the African traditional belief. The Roman Catholic belief of offering prayers to the dead souls in “purgatory” is perceived as unbiblical by some scholars and that it should be discarded by Christians.

Noboru Yamaguchi (1985:52) sums up the chapter by referring to honour and obedience to parents as a Christian’s obligation which does not imply ancestor worship. This is a very important point to make in refuting the understanding that the respect and honouring of parents transcends beyond the grave implied in wanting to use this Scripture reference to support ancestor worship by African Christian.

Chapter 4

Concluding Remarks

This thesis explicitly examines the complexities and complications that arise whenever there is a confrontation between two cultures and religions at a general level. In examining the development and the legitimacy of the African Christian beliefs in the area under review, there are a number of factors to be reckoned with. These are political factors, the power relations between European missionaries and Christian converts in the context of colonialism. Secondly, the societal cultures that these converts were steeped into prior to their Christian experience was also another factor. The third factor might also have been the poverty of the mission / mainline churches in the post-colonial period to be relevant.

Assessment of the African Christian beliefs in ancestors warranted that the researcher examines the social contexts that have provided the legitimacy of these beliefs within the contemporary South African Christian Church. These are true especially with regard to the African Independent Churches which have been the pioneers in popularising syncretism motivated by both political factors and socio-cultural and religious factors: the social emphasis and spiritual dimension (refer to Oosthuizen, 1997).

The introduction to this thesis sets out the basic tenet of African Christian ancestral beliefs. Mbiti (1961) and Mogoba (1981) provide an explanation of the belief in ancestors and the life after death. This is the view that as soon as the person dies, he/she becomes a “living dead.” This is the belief in that they retain features that describe them in physical forms.

It is assumed that this is the crux of what is believed by African Christians and non-Christians alike. Because of the fact that the population under study in the East London Metropolitan area is homogenous, except for the superficial differences which may differ according to family.

The use of the identification “African Christian” in this thesis may not be unproblematic. The use of this term in the literature and also in this thesis assumes that African Christians are those Christians who have already assumed the synthesis between the African Traditional beliefs and Christianity. What is important in this assessment is the attempt to examine if a responsible interpretation of the Bible in the South Africa context could be reached. This does not mean that African Christian beliefs have been pronounced *prima facie* as an irresponsible interpretation of the Bible in the South African context. The thesis attempts to examine all aspects and factors, such as anthropological aspects, which will lead the author to making responsible and reasonable conclusions to this assessment.

In examining the context of African Christian beliefs, for instance, the family or kinships is discussed, these place another spin on understanding the African Christian beliefs in ancestors and the continuance thereof, despite being steeped in Christian endeavours.

Important in the study is to understand the relation between the teaching of the Bible and the Xhosa traditional religious belief. The reason why this study is even worth undertaking is how it relates to Bible teaching. Ancestor beliefs and rituals are justified with reference to the commandment to one’s parents (Exodus, 20: 12) or to Christian ideas of life after death (1 Corinthians, 15:20).

This means that there is no break between the African traditional religious experiences and their new subscription to Christian faith.

According to Mugambi (1989: 67 – 69) consciously or sub-consciously, blacks have continued to consider their new faith in relation to their past existence, as individuals in contemporary society and as corporate members of their respective ethnic communities. This would relate to the importance of family/kinship relations as discussed by Van der Toorn (1996:194)

Manona (1981: 34 – 38) discusses a wide range of socio-political factors, which have led to the rise of African Christian beliefs in ancestors. This can be understood more with reference to African Independent Churches.

Of utmost importance to this thesis, is the discussion of the specific text for the exegesis.

- Syncretism (assumption is that Christianity and African Traditional beliefs in ancestors can be synthesized with the Christian faith) – the “fallacy of the synthesis” – can only be superficial but in essence they cancel each other in that their idea of ancestors comes directly in contradiction with idea of the person of Christ as divine and mediating between God and man.
- The problem with Paul in 1 Corinthians 8 is not only with the fact that the Corinthian Christians had to part with their old beliefs in idols, but his concern was the fact that these beliefs could not be held simultaneously because they (beliefs and devotion to foods/practices offered to idols) amount to idolatry. This would also apply to the Xhosa African Christians in the East London Metropolitan area.
- Historical and Social Background – Corinth was a Greco-Roman city, occupied by Greeks, Romans and Jews and later by Christians. Feasts were held, as Hays (1997: 136 – 137) puts it, in temples in the daily life of the city. In this section Paul’s solution to the conundrum at Corinthian Church is discussed, that is the fact that the Christian had to take into consideration the “weak” and “strong” Christians. This matter relates to the anthropological aspects discussed with respect to African Christians in the East London Metropolitan area (area under study). That family kinship may pressure the African Christians or Christians and they may have to consider these questions simply as a matter of duty in a community or neighbourhood.
- Exegetical Study in this thesis is trying to highlight certain theological terms used by Paul in solving the problem of “eating meat offered to idols” (1 Corinthians 8:4-6) within the Corinthian Church. It is a pity that after Paul had addressed the Christian community at Corinth, there was no report as to whether the “love” theory applied did work or not.

The theory itself sounds logically good and the present day Church accepts it as a theory that would have worked in solving the then prevailing problem in that particular church. In the text, Paul applied a rhetorical approach by appealing to the so-called strong members of the Corinthian Church, those who appeared to possess “knowledge” not to partake in “idol meat” for the sake of the “weak” brother (V. 8-9). It would be very difficult to approach the contemporary African Christians in and

around East London and ask them to refrain from indulging in rituals performed on behalf of the dead, on the grounds of application of the “love” theory for the sake of the “weak.” Taking into consideration the facts that have been drawn from the cases noted above (in Chapter 2) and authors in defence of the African Christian position , Africa Christians do not merely eat for the sake of eating but ancestor worship seems, from the evidence provided, to be their life and conviction.

Indulging in ancestor worship, means life and forsaking it is death to them. In a way it is the same Paul who said that an idol is nothing (v. 4) and at the same time confirms “food will not affect our standing with God (v. 8) ‘We neither lack anything if we do not eat, nor do we have abundance if we do eat’ (v. 9).

So, this text can be considered to be confusing to the lay person and if not carefully handled by differentiating between what is idolatry and not; and what the stand point of a Christian in such circumstances should be, there is bound to be more confusion and misunderstanding as far as the essence of Christianity among the contemporary group of people under study is concerned. But it is worth noting that the principle in not eating meat dedicated to idols does not reduce the detest of idols in the Pauline discourse but it is about the danger into which it could put the “weak” since they might not be able to discriminate between true worship of God and idolatry.

The text seems to be accommodating compromise on the part of the strong over the weak. According to Paul, two separate types of Christians were identifiable at Corinth viz. the strong and the weak. And Paul seems to be encouraging compromise by the strong for the sake of unity. Both parties’ consciences would be put at stake for even those who were strong, would be offended in finding themselves having to abstain from eating what they perceive not to be sin at all, for the sake of others (my view).

Love is not enforced on peoples’ hearts; love is the result of true faith in Christ that makes one to be a new creation (1 Corinthians 5:7). Orr and Walther (1996:235) are of the opinion that to believe in one God means that one must worship only one God and avoid participating in anything else. The “strong” Corinthian Christians were not asked to abstain from idol food because of their knowledge of Christ and the power of his resurrection, the knowledge that came from the righteousness of God (Philippians

3: 9-10), but because of their knowledge that an idol is nothing at all in the world (1 Corinthians 8: 4).

We, therefore, perceive that Paul's appeal for the application of love in this case refers to a conditional love. Love for the sake of the weak. It is not known whether the reconciliation plan of Paul based on this conditional love worked or not within the Corinthian Church. The Church in South Africa has to give a more careful attention to the African Christian problem of ancestor beliefs and practices that are increasing with time as indicated by the case studies and scholars in the thesis. If the church in South Africa and for that matter in the whole inhabited world is concerned about the issue of Ancestor beliefs or ancestor worship within its premises, it has to devise a holistic plan to deal with its concerns before they become out of hand.

Staple, Russel Lynn 183:5 has put it vividly that greater involvement in ancestor cults is more among those who are highly involved in churches and in church activities than those less involved.

The involvement in ancestor cults by African Christians of Xhosa speaking people, is undoubtedly an established phenomenon that the South African Council of Churches should be aware of if not yet and if possible inform the people concerned of whether the church gives its consent about it or not.

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